



# Overview of Goals of Sustainable Development on basic issues of Tribals in Attappady Tribal Block in Kerala

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## ABSTRACT

The indigenous population of the nation, known as Adivasi or scheduled tribes (STs), is among the poorest, vulnerable and most marginalized groups of the nation. Most of them remain at the lowest stratum of the society due to various factors like geographical and cultural isolation, low levels of literacy, primitive occupations and extreme levels of poverty. It is shocking to note that Kerala – a state with the remarkable achievements in human, and social (health) indicators – has excluded the tribal groups from its so-called achievements. So the basic facilities for Health and education itself are not inclusive for the tribal's at the time of emergency. Land degradation and marginalisation are interconnected phenomena which are threatening the entire life-support system of tribal communities in Attappady. The population of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala has increased from 3, 64,189 in 2001 to 4, 26,208 in 2008-10. Of which the tribal population in Attappady is 27,121 and there are 192 tribal hamlets in Attappady.

**Key words:** land Degradation, malnutrition, extreme levels of poverty, marginalization

More than 60 tribal infant/children died due to the combined impacts of loss of indigenous food items, poor public distribution system, unavailability of alternate nutritious food and the loss of employment opportunities, which led to widespread starvation along with high malnutrition and related health problems in Attappady, the only tribal block in the state of Kerala. The livelihood of tribal people is closely and inseparably connected with the system of management of the forest by the state. Development destroys their traditional, social, economic and cultural

structures without offering better alternative systems. There are there tribal communities in Attappady. They are Irula, Muduga and Kurumaba. Forest is not only a source of food, fuel and fodder, but also a part of their culture. A progressive decline of vegetative cover and loss of top soil due to unscientific management has had a disastrous impact, especially on watersheds and productivity of the soil. Added to this, encroachment by settlers and imposition of their cultivation practices has created a crisis in resource allocation in tribal settlements.

The whole demographic structure of Attappady has changed after the 1950s mainly due to uncontrolled influx of population. As a consequence, by the end of the 1960s demographic structure has turned to be unfavourable to tribals. During the 1940s, the tribal population of Attappady is estimated to be around 10,000 and the non-tribal population just a few hundred. According to the 1951 census, the proportion of non-tribal population to total population was just 9.68 per cent. The proportion rose to 67 percent in 1981 and 72 in 1991. And in 2001 it increased to 89 per cent. During 1951-61 the population in the area increased by 89 per cent, even though the increase of tribal population was only by 27 per cent. During this period the increase of settler population was at the exorbitant rate of 67 per cent. The next decade (1961 -7 1) also presents a similar picture with an increase of total population by 88 per cent and tribal population only by 17 per cent. The growth of non-tribal population was by 21 percent. Thus, the original inhabitants of the area were marginalised. The tribals have been forced to adopt ways of life of the settlers which led to the ruin of their rich cultural heritage and freedom of living.

### **Sustainable Development and Poverty**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) otherwise known as the Global goals, are a Universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice among other priorities. One of the main outcomes from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 was international agreement to negotiate a new set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to guide the path of sustainable development in the world after 2015.

The Rio+20 Outcome Document<sup>1</sup> Indicates that the goals are intended to be “action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” They should be “focused on priority areas for the achievement of sustainable development.” It examines how the SDGs as universal goals include significant challenges to developed countries to transform their own societies and economies in a more sustainable direction as well as contributing strongly to the global effort to speed the achievement of sustainable development in the developing countries. All of the SDGs are relevant and apply in general terms to all countries including developed countries. However, the nature and balance of the challenges they represent will be different in different national contexts. The study focuses on the first five goals of

Sustainable

development.

## 1. Land Alienation

The history of land alienation among the tribes began during British colonialism in India when the British interfered in the tribal region for the purpose of exploiting the tribal natural resources. In Attappady they lost 10,234 acres of land in between 1940-1982. Still there are no clear-cut land restoration policies in Attappady.

### Settlement and demographic change

It is not clear from the available literatures who were the earliest intruders into this area. In the opinion of some old settlers that the earliest were the Tamil-speaking Gowdians who came to Attappady in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly for buying forest produce. The early Gowndan settlers started cultivation in the land, which they managed to obtain by bribing the Kariasthans (Managers) of Jenmis. Gradually, they encroached into more lands in their vicinity. As there was shortage of local labour, these settlers brought workers from their native places under promise of higher wages (Mathur, 1975). A massive flow of people began during the 1950s in the eastern side of Attappady, mainly people from Thadakam and other parts of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

Before the colonisation trend and the massive move of people began from south and central regions of Kerala to Malabar and Attappady, relatives and neighbours of the Jenmis used to visit Attappady for various purposes. Their intention was collection of forest produce from the tribe's folk. Malayalis from the plain came to this area, in the beginning for jobs in the plantations started by the Britishers and work in the forest land leased by landlords for timber extraction. However, many of these original in-migrants did not settle down in Attappady because of the difficult terrain. After a while they left Attappady leaving their possessions to new in-migrants.

After independence, rapid changes occurred in settlement patterns. The area was opened for logging and settlement through construction of all weather roads in the region.

### Intensity of land issues among tribals

Tribal, the ethnic minority of Kerala, constitute one percent of the state's population. Formation of the state in 1956 and the division of the state into different districts horizontally left the tribal population of Kerala scattered, mostly in hilly areas. They started facing problems of existence with the encroachment of their ancestral land by powerful settlers from the plains, starting from pre-independence days. Paniya, the laborers constitute the major share of the 37 tribes of this state. Negligence of the state and mainstream politics, exploitation of the powerful communities mingled with the lack of education, denied access to land, food and health care made the life of the tribal's miserable in Kerala, as it's in the other Indian states. The state of Kerala passed the alienated tribal land [Restoration] Act in 1975, in conjunction with the then Indian Prime Minister Smt.Indira Gandhi's proclaimed 20 point programme as part of the Emergency measures. Presenting this Bill in the state Legislature the then Revenue Minister of Kerala proclaimed

that the Government treats all the alienated tribal lands as "Stolen property" and assured restoration of all the lands lost by Kerala tribals from January 26,1960. This 1975 Act was duly incorporated into the Ninth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Problems of the tribals got aggravated with the absence of cultivable land and very meager wages in the crises of the agriculture sector following the new generation economic policies. There were so many attempts from the part of the Governments in Kerala to bypass the 1975 Act through Amendments and Ordinances from 1986 onwards. But a writ petition filed by Dr.Nalla Thampi Thera in the Kerala High Court in 1988 pleading to direct the Kerala state to implement the 1975 Act, prevented all attempts of the governments to bypass the Act.

## 2. Poverty and Indebtedness

Majority of tribes lives under poverty line. The tribes follow many simple occupations based on simple technology. Most of the occupation falls into the primary occupations such as hunting, gathering and agriculture. In order to repay the debt they often mortgage or sell their land to the money lenders. Indebtedness is almost inevitable since heavy interest is to be paid to these moneylenders.

Tribal land issues are the most critical issue which tribals ever face in their life. This is the issue of not only the tribals in Kerala but also all sects of tribals in India. Tribals are losing command over land because of inadequate appreciation by the administrative machinery of the man-land relationship in tribal areas, which is the essence of tribal life. One of the most important reasons for the failure of livelihood strategies of the tribals is the alienation and loss of their land. They are deprived from the agriculture. Now the Government provided them the Package of "Community Kitchen" for the tribal livelihood options. This is actually a clear cut programmes for the tribal development not the real solution for the problems in tribal life. The real issues has to be tackled. Studies have revealed that when the man-land equation has been disturbed, it has proved to be disastrous to tribal economy and life, and they have been forced to quit their age-old habitat. Abandonment of the natural habitat has brought about a deleterious effect on the economy and life of the tribals. The programmes for tribal upliftment without restoring their land will not give any positive impact on tribal development. In this backdrop, with regard to land administration in the interest of Tribals of Attappady the following need urgent attention:

1. Restoration of alienated lands (about 300 acres)
2. Allotment/Assignment of about 2500 acres of alternate land by the Government.
3. Rehabilitation of STs on lands provided by the Government.
4. Issue of Record of Rights through the survey and demarcation of the revenue land holdings of STs (about 22,000 acres?): shall be the single most enduring and beneficial intervention in the lives of the tribals of Attappady
5. Subsequent resurvey of all revenue lands in Attappady.

### 3. Health and Nutrition

Tribal population suffers from chronic infections and diseases out of which water borne diseases are life threatening. They also suffer from deficiency diseases. Malnutrition is common and has affected the general health of the tribal children as it lowers the ability to resist infection, leads to chronic illness and sometimes leads to brain impairment.

Increased number of child death is common in Attappady over the last few years. There are many reasons for this situation. Lack of proper nutrition is essentially one of the prime reasons for this. All the neonatal deaths in Attappady are due to malnutrition and lack of basic health care and lack of social security measures and lack of Human Development. The same are the causes in general population as well, but in Attappady it accrues in an exaggerated manner. (Dr.P.K Sasidharan2012). They lack basic facilities like toilets, safe drinking water and balanced diet. Effectively they do not possess land for cultivation, even if they have to engage in cultivation. The massive deforestation is the root cause of all the problems. They lack basic amenities like safe drinking water, balanced diet, sanitation facilities and decent housing which are human issues as well. Lack of social security and lack of Human development are the real issues to be addressed. Basically by attaining education they can solve most of their problems to a great extent. They can bring back to their traditional mode of cultivation. For this they need rain. But due to deforestation they lost that vicious circle of life. Ultimately they are begging in front of the outsiders for their land. The result is the large scale alcoholism and they become very lazy, malnourished and sick. There was a sharp difference between the Silent valley with large number of high growing trees in and places like Nellipathy, Kottatahra, and Mulli having no trees at all. Whatever cultivation they do also destroyed by the wild animals which come in to the open space due to loss of forest. Whole problem in Attappady thus be raised from massive deforestation. In the name of developing them certain schemes have introduced and spent some money without any vision. Still they continued to suffer and get even more exploited. Shortage of money to buy essential items including the medicine and balanced diet, about which they have no ideas at all.

### 4. Education

The state of education in Attappady is not in an exact clear picture for their overall development. Dropout rate is very high in this area due to many reasons. Alienation of tribal language, distance travelled from their home to school is a very important reason for their growth pattern. Scheduled Tribes who have been historically out of the mainstream development initiatives partly due to the still continuing socio-economic barriers and partly due to the inadequacy of the Government programmes in reaching these disadvantaged groups, still find themselves in difficult to compete with other sections of the society. The disparities between the marginalized communities and other social groups in terms of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The disparities increase at higher and higher levels of education, particularly in technical and professional education which provide better access to more remunerative jobs. It these disparities within the state that matter more in view of the high unemployment rate in the state and consequently the highly competitive nature of the labour market. Further, in formulating policies and programmes for tribal education. It is essential to understand the complex realities of tribal life and the expectation of tribals from the system, and this has never been done either by the tribal welfare department or by the

education department. Consequently, no worthwhile policy for tribal education has been formed. Because the more pass percentage rate from the schools of STs can only produces more students for higher education. The internal problems of tribal education refer to the quality of school provision, suitable teachers, relevance of content and curriculum, medium of instruction, pedagogy, and special supervision. A majority of schools in tribal areas are without basic infrastructure facilities. Though the demand for changing the content and curriculum to suit the tribal context has been an old one, no serious effort has been made in this direction in any state, except for some sporadic pilot projects. The uniform structure and transaction of curriculum has put tribal children at a disadvantage. Apart from all this, lack of awareness of the teachers about tribal culture and environment also force the tribal students to withdraw from education. All these issues are emerging in their primary and high school levels. These constraints force them to drop-out their education at very early levels and higher education will be only a dream for them.

Reasons for Drop-out among tribal students

1. Low socio-economic status: - Tribals enjoy low socio-economic status. Miller (1988) has identified four major classes of variables such as cognitive variables, physical variables and motivational variables where disadvantaged learners show poor performance as compared with the advantaged groups.

2. Tribal concepts of pleasure:- Tribals are giving more importance for their pleasure such as dance, music and other types of entertainments prevalent in the society.

3. Existence of ethnic stereotypes: - Stereo typing is a natural and inevitable. It helps us to organize life. But such typing turns in to prejudice or stereotypes when based on little facts and it is used as a mechanism to establish the myth of racial or cultural superiority.

4. Tribal concept of learning:- In most of the tribal cultures learning is an active pleasurable event mostly carried on among peers. But the existing system of education does not take in to account their learning style.

5. Linguistic problems:-Tribal languages, except a very few, belong to Austro-Asiatic language family and are different from dominant non tribal languages of India which belong either to the Indo European or the Dravidian family. In most of the time tribals face acute problems in language.

6. Problem of learning English: - Tribals need for English is great, they face problems in learning than their non-tribal counterparts. For tribals their typical use of regional languages interferes with English. For them English are 5th or 6th languages.

7. Problems in learning to read:-Tribals have long oral tradition. Their culture is oral. Their history, myths and traditions are orally handed down from generation to generation. Most of the language does not have scripts of their own; their oral tradition still continues to exist.

8. Psychological problems: - Financial problems of the tribals always make the tribals in a very depressed condition. They have lots of wants and but the means to satisfying them is very less. It leads to many psychological issues.

9. Academic and administrative problems: - Even though the number of programmes for the upliftment of tribal education is many, the percentage of people receiving these benefits is very less. Administrative authorities are always showing very neutral attitude towards the education of the tribals

10. Indifferent attitude of tribal parents: - Tribal parents are mostly illiterate. They always show a very indifferent attitude towards the education of their children. They are interested in providing household responsibilities to their children a very early stage of their education. “The parents of these students do not have any relationship with the society outside and are unaware of the importance of education. All teachers are talented. Teaching such children is a herculean task”.

11. Indifferent attitude of tribal teachers: Teachers do not take much effort to improve the educational level of the tribal students. Lack of communication, high level of absenteeism in the class, bad result in study, lack of attention in classroom by the tribals are some of the factors that has increased the indifferent attitude of the teachers towards the tribal students.

12. Indifferent attitude of tribal students: Students clearly said don't like someone forcing me to get up early in the morning. So, I was unhappy to go to school... Subjects like Malayalam and Science are good for me, but, English, Hindi and Mathematics are very tough. I could not follow English and Hindi classes. Whenever I commit mistakes, in front of others, teachers used to scold me, beat and pinch my ears. You ask others; almost 90% of the children have similar experiences.

In addition to all the above causes some other causes can also be cited as the background for the reasons for Drop-out. They are:

1. Extreme level of poverty, deprivation and vulnerability
2. High levels of exclusion, developmental, social and economic
3. Extremely low level of empowerment-political, social and economic
4. Low level of access to entitlement
5. Practically zero participation in development matters with no autonomy in any form of decision-making
6. Poor human development with low level of literacy and access to health care
7. Rapid alienation of assets like land
8. Alarming depletion of social capital especially traditional forms of organization and leadership.
9. Quick deterioration of traditional knowledge system and cultural attainment etc.

## 5. Cultural Problems

Due to contact with other cultures, the tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change. Due to influence of Christian missionaries, the problem of bilingualism has developed which led to indifference towards tribal language. The tribal people are imitating Western culture in different aspects of their social life and leaving their own culture. The erosion of tribal culture to a great extent destroyed their life. They deeply believed in cultural composition of their life. But the settlement pattern and mainstream culture destroyed their culture.

## 6. Vicious cycle of the Alchaholism in tribal hamlets

Addiction to illicit liquor is one of the main reasons behind increasing problems among the tribal communities in Attappady. Most men spend all their wages on alcohol and women are doomed to shoulder the burden of their families. Pregnant women work till their child is born, and then return to work a few days after delivery. Hard work, lack of proper food and rest, repeated pregnancies, violence at home and no peace of mind at the end of the day—all this leads to mental and physical deterioration.

**7. Absence of livelihood:** This is one of the important issues of the Tribals in this area. They cultivated more than 60 varieties of vegetables, 50 varieties of fruits, gathered edible roots, honey and medicinal plants. Their diet included meat, fish and milk. The deprivation from protein rich food habit to the chronic ill health and disease has created negative imbalances in their livelihood system.

## Conclusion

For the complete development of tribes the clear development strategy is very important. Lack of vision is the reason for Attappady has become a place of higher mortality of the children. The permanent solution to problems of tribal is to enable them to cultivate the land they own with their traditional crops. They can assure tehri minimum livelihood option only with the restoration of their land. In order to achieve this, an approach which combine the plus points of their traditional method of cultivation and modern agricultural technique which is acceptable to the natives need to be adopted. The real picture of Tribal development in Kerala is much worse than what we expecting. Immediate solution for the issues is very essential. Automatically any one among the five Goals can be achieved.

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